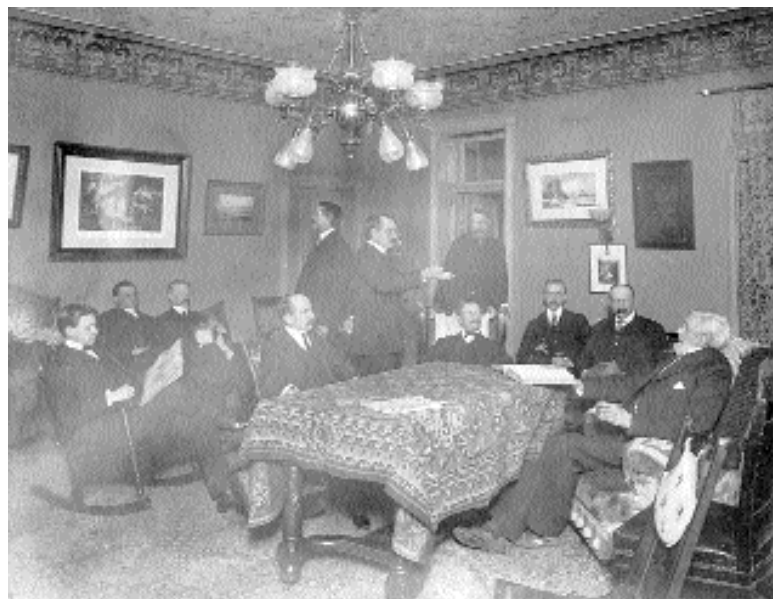


From Restoration to Fund-raising

Statue of Cleopatra was a gift to the Kohrses from influential cattle buyers. NPS photo by Jonna Mihalic. Postcard courtesy Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS.

Sitting room of the Kohrs home, Deer Lodge, Montana, 1904. Courtesy Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS.



Museum collections at Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site in Deer Lodge, Montana, have been used in a variety of ways. They help to recreate an important time period of American history. They have even been used to boost sales of the cooperating association, which in turn benefits the interpretation and preservation of the ranch.

The ranch is the original 1860s trading post of French Canadian trapper/trader John Francis Grant. Conrad Kohrs, a butcher and eventual cattle baron, purchased the operation in 1866. The site became the home ranch for Kohrs and his half-brother and full partner, John Bielenberg. Beginning in the 1930s, the ranch was operated by Kohrs' grandson, Conrad Warren. Warren and his wife were diligent in preserving the buildings and objects in them in hopes it would one day be a museum. In 1972, Congress created this National Historic Site to "provide an understanding of the frontier cattle era of the Nation's history, to preserve the Grant-Kohrs Ranch and to interpret the nationally significant values thereof for the benefit of future generations."

The site's cultural resources include an amazingly intact cultural landscape including 90 structures, a museum collection of approximately 20,000 objects (mostly original to the site), and archival materials pertaining to the personal and business papers of Kohrs and Warren.

The focal point of this 1,500-acre site is the ranch house—trading post and home of Grant, home ranch to Kohrs and Warren. It was built in

1862 and, according to Johnny Grant, "Cost me a pretty penny." In 1890, Kohrs added a three-level brick structure to the original log and clapboard building. Over the years, the house was modified. After much debate, the Rocky Mountain Regional Cultural Resource staff decided the ranch house should be restored inside and out to approximately 1900. With this decision, the museum and archival collection came into play. Historic photos in the archives were used to document the appearance of the rooms and were essential in writing the Historic Furnishings Report. Luckily, 90% or more of the original furnishings and accessories were already in the collection and ready for placement.

The dining room and sitting room were in poor condition due to water damage. Research had to be done on the floor, walls, and ceilings to determine what was appropriate for a 1900 room. Again, the historic photos were invaluable. Examples of historic wallpaper, ceiling paper, and cove paper in the museum collection were used with the photos to reproduce exactly the original treatment of the room. The original carpet in the sitting room had been re-used by the family upstairs and was in the museum collection. A sample of it was used to make the closest possible replica available with modern technology. Visitor and staff are amazed when copies of the historic photos of these rooms and a sample of the original carpet are shown. The restoration work, along with original furnishings, recreates almost exactly the turn-of-the-century rooms where the Kohrs lived and entertained.

Outside, the Grant section of the house has many windows framed by green shutters. Over the years, the shutter hardware had deteriorated. A set of the hardware in the museum collection was loaned to a foundry, a copy mold of the original made, and several sets of reproduction hardware produced. The preserved shutters with their reproduction hardware preserves the character of the exterior of the house. The original set remains safely in storage.

On the other end of the house, off the side of the 1890s addition, is a porch. When the park acquired the house, all that was left of the original porch structure was the floor and ceiling. All else



had been destroyed while closing in the area with walls and windows. However, historic photos in the archives showed the original was the one expressive element of the addition with its ornamental carpentry of eight columns, low balustrades and grillwork. A decision was made to restore the porch to its original appearance. The historic photo helped, but most important were the original porch balusters found by curatorial staff in outdoor sheds and cataloged into the museum collection. They were used to exactly replicate the decorative railings. Today, the view of the house from the lower yard toward the porch is the most enjoyed and photographed portion of the ranch house.

On display in the house is a reproduction quilt. A group of local quilters, looking for a fun and worthwhile project, selected a quilt from the museum collection and created an exact reproduction. The replica is exhibited on the bed in the master bedroom, enjoyed by thousands of visitors a year, while the original is safe in curatorial storage.

Another museum object was reproduced for use on site. Kohrs' wife, Augusta, raised a beauti-

Postcards were needed for sale in the visitor contact station. The curator at that time consciously selected an image of the formal parlor showing "Kleopatra." She is a plaster sculpture on an ornate base, given to the Kohrses as a gift by their Chicago cattle broker. Little else was known but through the wide distribution of the postcards (and a similar photograph featured in an article in *Reader's Digest*), information was received from people located all over the country. We not only learned more about our Kleo but the other owners of like statues learned more about theirs.

The biggest selling item at the visitor center is a blueprint for constructing a museum piece exhibited in the ranch house kitchen. The object is a ladder-back chair associated with a nice family story. The family purchased the chair for the 4'10" cook who couldn't reach the kitchen cupboards designed for the 6' Augusta Kohrs. The chair's seat and extended extra legs are hinged and can be tipped up to create a step ladder. A dedicated and talented interpretive park ranger drew up construction plans and over 12,000 copies have been sold to date.

The museum and archival collection at Grant-Kohrs Ranch continues to be used on a daily basis. Some 30,000 visitors a year see approximately 10% of the collection on exhibit in the 1890s ranch house, the 1930s bunkhouse and tack room, and the horse drawn vehicle exhibit. Just this year we have received research requests concerning various furnishings, wallpaper, former employees, historic water uses, and the hydraulic ram system used to get water from the spring to the ranch house. We hope to continue to make our collections available in any number of creative ways in the future.

Christine Ford is the Grant-Kohrs Ranch curator, charged with collection management. She welcomes questions or comments on the article through cc:Mail to Chris_Ford at NP-GRKO, or mailed to Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS, P.O. Box 790, Deer Lodge, MT 59722, 406-846-3268, Fax 406-846-3962.

Restored sitting room. NPS photo by Jonna Mihalic, 1988. Courtesy Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS.



ful ornamental garden south of the house. It is wonderfully recreated by a 15-year seasonal, who often employed the use of a modern metal and rubber-tired wheelbarrow. A wooden wheelbarrow in the collection was reproduced and now fits nicely into the historic scene. It worked so well, that another was made and used to block the open doorway into the coal shed. It is filled with coal and keeps young visitors from climbing on the mound inside. Finally, museum objects are used to raise funds for our cooperating association, the Glacier Natural History Association.